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Herbie Lucid

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HERBIE LUCID

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

by

Jerry Eugene Sexton

May 2007

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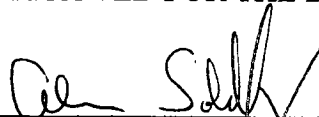
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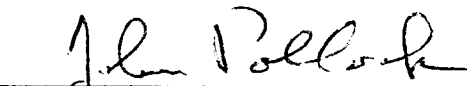
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ABSTRACT

HERBIE LUCID

by Jerry Eugene Sexton

Herbie Lucid is a cycle of narrative poems designed to be read straight through from the beginning. Herbie, a rock musician who is blocked and wants his poet-girlfriend back, studies poetry at a local university and discovers his own self-worth. If Herbie does not come through with new lyrics for his band, he is out. And if Wanda, his girlfriend, does not get the tenured track position she has applied for, she will have to leave. With pressure on each of them, they break up.

Herbie enrolls in a poetry class at Wanda's school, one not taught by her, to get over his block. Wanda takes up with her ex-, Roger, a tenured-colleague in her department who insists he can get her onto the tenure-track. In both metrical and free verse poems, Herbie's story plays out. The narrative arc follows whether Herbie can produce new lyrics for his band, and whether he gets Wanda back.

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The following poems have appeared in *Green's Magazine*: "Herbie Lucid"; "Herbie Lucid, You Should Know What You Did"; and "Herbie Meditates" (published as "Herbie Muses").

DISCLAIMER

Any resemblance between persons living or dead and characters in this manuscript is unintentional and coincidental.

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INTRODUCTION

Herbie Lucid is a cycle of poems with a narrative arc, intended to be read straight through from the beginning. There are a number of recent precedents for such book-length narrative poem sequences. Let me mention just two notable examples whose structure I have drawn on to write my book: Vikram Seth's *Golden Gate*, a satiric novel written entirely in sonnets, and Rita Dove's *Thomas and Beulah*, a cycle of poems about her maternal grandparents. Dove's book is clearly to be read straight through from the beginning. Its narrative arc tells how these two people met, courted, and married and survived difficulties because of the bond between them. Both Seth's and Dove's books suggest ways that the juxtaposition of poems can be handled as the narrative arc is progressed. Seth's work is longer than Dove's and uses more directly linked juxtapositions over long sequences while Dove's shorter work uses a mix of close and less directly connected juxtapositions. Seth primarily picks up at the beginning of a sonnet what was being talked about at the end of the immediately prior sonnet. Some of Seth's sonnets are linked to the next by breaking a sentence in the middle and finishing it at the beginning of the next sonnet. I have opted not to make this direct a connection between successive poems. But some pairs of my poems have the second poem as direct response to the one immediately prior, e.g., "Poet Gwendolyn Urges Herbie" and "Herbie-To-Herbie Re: A New Endeavor." Herbie is urged to do something else to get over being blocked when trying to write lyrics for his band. His response is to study poetry on his own.

I wrote Herbie Lucid's story in two different genres. Besides poetry, I also wrote a screenplay with the same narrative arc as the poetry manuscript. I finished the draft of the screenplay first. (The screenplay is not included here.) The poems and the screenplay both are, and are not, each an adaptation of the other. Herbie Lucid began as a character in a poem, the first poem in the manuscript here. I wrote a few other poems about Herbie and then undertook writing the screenplay with Herbie as the hero. The screenplay does not contain Herbie's internal thoughts and feelings. Such things cannot be successfully handled in the visual medium of film. In the screenplay, Herbie's girlfriend Wanda drives him to distraction by still being cordial after they've broken up. This part of the screenplay story arc has been almost entirely suppressed for the poetry manuscript.

I found working out the narrative arc in another medium facilitated my writing and organizing the poems. I already knew where the turning points were, the midpoint where the hero becomes committed to being proactive, and how the climax and resolution would play out, as well as all the complications along the way.

Some screenwriting textbooks discuss polishing dialogue by going back to "put in the music"--a characteristic of poetry. Linda Seger, in her *Advanced Screenwriting*, says screenwriters rewrite their dialogue by "honing it, saying it out loud, shaping the rhythms, sometimes using alliteration and rhymes" (207).

Typically, I would take a significant scene from the screenplay, write out the dialogue and descriptions, then reshape this material into a poem. If something in the

poem still read too much like stage directions, that passage, I realized, had to be modified, nuanced, opened up, somehow changed to become more poetic. Revising what was essentially too much exposition from a poem and then looking again at the scene in the screenplay sometimes led to modifications there as well. At least in one instance, I had written the poem before I added its corresponding scene to the screenplay: "How this Romance Story Got Started." The screenplay was improved by adding this scene.

There's not a poem for every scene or a scene for every poem nor are all dramatic monologues and character sketches reflected in the screenplay. Some poems contain interior monologues--Herbie talking to himself--or the author-narrator speaking to Herbie. Herbie also speaks to the reader, as well as to Wanda, his girlfriend. It is intentionally left ambiguous if the narrator is also Herbie.

A precedent for such ambiguity is John Berryman's *Dream Songs*. Berryman's Henry--likely the poet's persona--speaks about himself in the third person, is spoken to, and spoken about by the narrator. Berryman persistently denied he was Henry, although "[m]any critics have contended that he protests too much" (Maio, 121). According to Helen Vendler, "Henry is not Berryman, but neither is Henry not Berryman" (120). Nevertheless, *Dream Songs*, though likely confessional, is entirely composed of monologues and does not have a developed narrative arc. Unlike *Dream Songs*, there are also monologues and character sketches for characters other than Herbie in my manuscript.

A few other poets who influenced the tone of this manuscript include Alan Dugan

("Morning Song"), Frank O'Hara ("Poem" [Lana Turner has collapsed!]), Edwin Arlington Robinson ("Miniver Cheevy"), and the French poet Max Jacob ("Literature and Poetry"). A look at Dugan and Robinson's poem examples will serve as illustration:

Morning Song -- Alan Dugan

Look, it's morning, and a little water gurgles in the tap.
I wake up waiting, because it's Sunday, and turn twice more
than usual in bed, before I rise to cereal and comic strips.
I have risen to the morning danger and feel proud,
and after shaving off the night's disguises, after searching
close to the bone for blood, and finding only a little,
I shall walk out bravely into the daily accident.

"Morning Song" is three sentences of free verse in seven lines, a poem with subtle use of assonance and consonance. The poem is confrontational in tone and attention-seeking, a poem of understated irony. The last word "accident" is set up by prior expectations being established. Each of its individual sounds is echoed in prior sounds within previous words in the poem. In the last line, *d* and *nt* appear in "*daily*" and "*into*." The first vowel sound in "*into*" either matches or is closely related to the last vowel sound in "*accident*," depending on pronunciation there. The harsh *a* sound appears in "*and*" in lines 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 and in "*after*" twice in line 5. It also appears in the end word "*tap*" in line 1. But "*accident*" is not a word that would be strongly expected based on established prior expectations. The *k* and *s* sounds of the two different *cs* in "*accident*" are less prevalent in the poem, occurring in the same order as in "*accident*" only in "*comic strips*" in line 3. Therefore, when "*accident*" comes at the end, it is a jolt. That it still satisfies prior expectations leads to its working and acceptance as a satisfactory last

word in the poem. This is a way all jokes and witticisms work.

The poem begins with three jammed stresses and therefore is immediately energetic. Since the first word is the imperative "Look," form matches content well here. The first four and the last line have masculine endings. The fifth and sixth lines have feminine endings. The lines are "and after shaving off the night's disguises, after searching / close to the bone for blood, and finding only a little," Compared to the content of the other five lines in the poem, the speaker is less effectual in what he does here. The weaker line endings work well with the content. The last line, coming right after the less effective action of the fifth and sixth lines, again has a masculine ending. It gives the impression of a return to being resolute, resolved to "walk out bravely into the daily accident."

Miniver Cheevy -- Edwin Arlington Robinson

Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn,
Grew lean while he assailed the seasons;
He wept that he was ever born,
And he had reasons.

Miniver loved the days of old
When swords were bright and steeds were prancing;
That vision of a warrior bold
Would set him dancing.

Miniver sighed for what was not,
And dreamed, and rested from his labors;
He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot,
And Priam's neighbors.

Miniver mourned the ripe renown
That made so many a name so fragrant;

He mourned Romance, now on the town,
And Art, a vagrant.

Miniver loved the Medici,
Albeit he had never seen one;
He would have sinned incessantly
Could he have been one.

Miniver cursed the commonplace
And eyed a khaki suit with loathing;
He missed the mediaeval grace
Of iron clothing.

Miniver scorned the gold he sought,
But sore annoyed was he without it;
Miniver thought and thought and thought,
And thought about it.

Miniver Cheevy, born too late,
Scratched his head and kept on thinking;
Miniver coughed, and called it fate,
And kept on drinking.

"Miniver Cheevy" contains eight quatrains with a loosely structured narrative arc. The rhyme scheme is *abab, cdcd*, etc. Each stanza has three longer lines followed by a punchy shorter last line. In this, it superficially resembles the sapphic even though none of the lines are sapphic lines (trochee, trochee, dactyl, trochee, trochee).

Within each stanza, the tone of the first two lines is undone by the second pair of lines. The first and third lines have masculine endings while the second and fourth lines have feminine endings. The effect of this use of craft is a unified poem that is consistently off kilter until it reaches a sardonic resolution in the last line of the poem.

Most stanzas have 8, 9, 8, and 5 syllables in consecutive lines. The last stanza is

8, 8, 8, 5. The craft sets up the ending. The name "Miniver," when it appears, appears only as the first word in the stanzas except in the last two, where it also appears as the first word of the third line--indicating both something is coming and greater emphasis on the character Minver as an individual whose nature will be spelled out.

The loose narrative arc is about Miniver's dissatisfaction with present-day life. The first stanza ends "He wept that he was ever born / And he had reasons." The next five stanzas list these reasons. The penultimate stanza has Miniver scorning gold but being annoyed without it. Here the third and fourth lines do not undo the first and second lines in the way this happens in prior stanzas. Miniver's response is to think about his lack of wealth. In the final stanza, the word "coughed" echoes "sought" and "thought" in the penultimate stanza and also the related words "without" and "about." These sound echoes add to the sense of resolution in the final stanza. Miniver's non-solution is to keep on drinking.

It is of some interest how Robinson responded to a review of his first book in 1897, which said, "His humor is of a grim sort and the world is not beautiful to him but a prison house." He replied, "The world is not a 'prison house,' but a kind of spiritual kindergarten where millions of children are trying to spell 'God' with the wrong blocks" (Faggen xx).

The character Herbie Lucid has both a similar wry outlook on life to Miniver Cheevy's and a drinking problem. In terms of craft, the Herbie poems are closer in style to Dugan's intentional flatness and free-verse wit. In my poems, when lyrical phrases

occur such as "Tell me again just how/ the strings sing and soar. And how does the day/ enter, longing for a different dawn?"--from the poem "What Was Said to Herbie in the Mirror"--they are often said in derision. While my manuscript is a mix of metrical and mostly non-metrical poems, they tend with one notable exception to be anti-lyrical. However, the poem "Herbie and the Far Sounds" is intentionally lyrical and is indebted to Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "The Carousel."

Another influence that resonates in several of my poems is early twentieth-century French poet Max Jacob. The influence of Jacob's prose poems from his book *The Dice Cup*, such as "Literature and Poetry," with their comedic endings produced by their syllogistic structures is evident in "At the Band's Rehearsal" and "Herbie in the Drunk Tank." Paul Auster, in his anthology of French poetry, calls Jacob's work anti-lyrical comedy (xxxv). I have also learned from Jacob ways to use vernacular speech. Jacob's poems often "speak" in the vernacular and often use dialogue to good effect. Many of my poems employ similar use of dialogue.

Other individual poems of mine are also influenced by specific poems of other poets. "A Call to Awareness" is influenced by Wallace Stevens's "The Idea of Order at Key West." Stevens's poem is about a woman who shapes the landscape with the words she sings beside the sea. "A Call to Awareness" begins "She seeks out words, words that shape the world." This is the poem in which Wanda breaks off her relationship with Herbie.

Some of the word play in my poems is also influenced by Stevens, e.g., the phrase

"She thinks she'll never be as free as me" from the poem "Who's Who for Herbie Lucid" and "Soon, with work, my steady Strat and maybe new songs" from "Sometimes the Words Don't Come Easy." And the idea of "eternity in a moment"--from my poem "Addressing Herbie's Block"--plays to Stevens's notion that "Beauty is momentary in the mind-- / The fitful tracing of a portal; / But in the flesh it is immortal" from Stevens's poem "Peter Quince at the Clavier." Images haunt us, as Robert Hass says, because "what perishes and what lasts forever have been brought into conjunction, and accompanying that sensation is a feeling of release from the self" (275). Herbie Lucid likes to think he has a strong capacity for such feelings. That, plus an anti-lyrical bent, makes Herbie an interesting character.

Like Robinson's Miniver Cheevy, Herbie Lucid is an invented character. Rita Dove's Thomas and Beulah, on the other hand, are real people--her grandparents. To write her sequence Dove worked from artifacts of the couple's actual life. Dove's strategy for constructing the narrative of her speakers contrasts starkly with Berryman's Henry, who is likely Berryman himself. Robinson was interested in drama rather than *écriture* (Faggen, xi). Dove's purpose was to tell the story of her grandparents. The poet and critic Mark Jarman says, "Berryman's muse was a playwright--or better yet a director for the stage, ordering 'Dramatize!'" (82). My manuscript is similarly informed by a screenplay. My purpose is to entertain.

Jarman notes the recent resurgence of interest in narrative poetry--what is termed "the new narrative poetry" (93). Such poetry consists primarily of telling dramatic stories

of one or more characters in an extended sequence of poems. Such new narrative poetry strives also to be lyrical--often by using fixed forms (Gioia). *Herbie Lucid* is a cycle of narrative poems. Where does it fit in all this? *Herbie Lucid* is not fully a part of the new narrative poetry because I have intentionally adopted an anti-lyrical stance. My manuscript may still be seen as a part of the resurgence of interest in narrative poetry if narrative poetry is assumed to be a larger concept than the more restricted new narrative poetry and its penchant for lyric writing.

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HERBIE LUCID

Herbie chases the ghost of Jim Morrison, aspires
to songs of himself, carries oversized copies of
Leaves of Grass, titles facing out.

All this is more than not working.
It's the now. He's good. He's here.
Yet the new songs are already old.

Herbie Lucid feels cheated tonight: he has not been allow'd
his portion of
the eternal purports of the world.

We're in place, no further need to gather. It's certain:
Herbie Lucid of the Trepidations
may be about to sing.

SOME FACILE WORDS FOR HERBIE

Herbie, why do you bother Herbie?
Herbie knows, and that bothers Herbie.

Herbie can't stop monitoring himself,
can't stop puncturing his impulse to
pomposity, or mocking himself when he's down.
It makes for some pretty skewed Herbie-to-Herbie talks:

Just the other day Herbie wondered why Herbie
couldn't not write, why Herbie couldn't
write right now. The bind that put him in,
he used as reason to booze.

Herbie-to-Herbie: "Dude, you've been
obsessing a steady diet of Cream of Wheat
and cheese. Yeah, man. That's why
I have concrete between the ears."

Herbie, you do need to listen to yourself.
That ain't necessarily a monitoring thing.
Hell, Herbie, write it down. It could save your liver.

SOMETIMES IN THE CONTEXT OF PLEASURE

"The wonderful comfort of you," Herbie says
as Wanda lies in his arms. "Mmm," she adds as he
pulls her closer, plays keyboard on her thigh.
"I wish," she says, "you didn't know how much that turns me on."
"Just making music," he says, gives her a squeeze.
She embraces him back--he, too, flesh
good to caress, to hug, flesh firm but yielding. She rises,
begins to dress. Herbie's eyes implore her to stay.
"No breakfast for me. I have to go."
"I like," he says, "that it's just us."
She kisses her forefinger, touches his nose.
"Good-bye, just you," and she gets a smile. "You're drinking again."
"I'm on top of it," he says. "I wonder sometimes, Herbie, just why I love you."
Unenlightened and without a clue, the look on Herbie's face
could illuminate any room.

AS IF IN A MOVIE:
HOW THIS ROMANCE STORY GOT STARTED

Herbie sits alone at the only available table in the park.
He feeds the sparrows that hop close to him. No one else
in the park feeds them. Herbie bends to place the food.
Wanda approaches looking for a place to sit.
Tenderness crosses her face as she sees Herbie feeding the birds.
Wanda catches Herbie's eye as she walks in his direction, responds warmly to his reaction.
Herbie looks around, shrugs and smiles, and motions for her to sit across from him.

"I'm desperate for a place to sit," Wanda says. "Thanks."
"What's the book you have?" Herbie asks.
Wanda shows him a copy of Leaves of Grass and sets her bag lunch down. "Do you
always carry it with you?" Herbie says.
"Was the title showing?" Wanda asks. "Clearly visible from a distance," he replies.
"It's legit," she says as she sets things out. "I teach at the university."

"I like the poem about the ancient astronomer the best," Herbie says, looks at her beer.
"You read Whitman?" Wanda says, and offers the beer.
He waves it away. Wanda motions to the beer again. "I can't," Herbie says.
Wanda says, "Oh?"
Herbie offers his sandwich. She takes a small piece.
"Meetings. Steps. You know," he says. "I see," she says.

A sheepish smile on Herbie's face, Wanda tastes the sandwich, nods
toward the rest of it. "Turkey and cranberry," Herbie says. "Mm," Wanda says.
She swallows. "I see you're staying," he says. "I'm hungry." "I'm Herbie."
"Hi... Wanda Watanabe." "Professor?" Herbie asks.
"Poetry and other courses," she replies. "You?"
"Ever go to concerts?" Herbie says. Wanda looks at him: "What
instrument do you play?" He plays great air guitar.
She says, "You're trying to intrigue me."
"I write songs for the Trepidations." "So you live to work."
"Sometimes, we work to live." Wanda's face says, "Don't we all."
Herbie bends and drops food for the birds. "I've seen you before then," she says.
Herbie says, "I could get you a pass." "Okay," she says, "now I am intrigued."
"Actually, I beat you to that," Herbie says.
Wanda gives Herbie a wry smile: "Did you, now? I
wouldn't be too sure. I was privy to my thoughts as I walked up here."
Herbie grins: "So guess who else at this table is intrigued."

EXPOSITION AND INTERROGATION FOR WANDA

Wanda really wants that secure job:
The one, the only one, on the tenure track
they've opened, the one where she could write
her own stuff and they couldn't get rid of her.

To hedge her bets, she's looking elsewhere
out of state and throughout the Bay Area
for university teaching jobs,
and college ones as well. Because they'd agreed--

she and Herbie--to relocate if
one of them hits it big, their well-considered
relationship just might be tested
to the breaking point and end in breaking up.

Wanda loves Herbie--what'll happen next?
Herbie loves Wanda--pray, how will that end up?

HERBIE LUCID, YOU SHOULD KNOW WHAT YOU DID

Wanda Watanabe looks Herbie full in the face.
Herbie's thoughtfulness has momentarily lapsed once too often.

Herbie's going to make it in lyrics; he can write resonant phrases.
Herbie Lucid's even got a "lady-poet" significant other.

Significant other Wanda
arches a brow, pulls herself to full height--
recites:

Let there be an unbraiding of parody and reverence,
a cessation of equating of mere similarities.
Follow the passage from sound to syllable
with no little dances of suggestion and fear.

When I say I'm going to go
and you say, "Going, going, gone. Are you gone?"--
I'll let you know when I'm gone; I'll yell.

If you're having trouble with your grammar,
let your grandfather make the corrections.

Oh?
It is, Herbie, the word you didn't look up
because the dictionary weighed too much.

WHAT WAS SAID TO HERBIE IN THE MIRROR

Fumble your way, subverting/pursuing tradition.
The object is not to find a clever way
to be jaded. Tell me again just how
the strings sing and soar. And how does the day
enter, longing for a different dawn?

I've seen you make obeisance to
what you might as well forget.
Who are you? Do you know
the square root of up?

Walk fast wherever you go. Rarely look back.
Learn the Alexander Technique;
lead with your head. Respect
will pursue you.

Sit, slowly blink. Display a beatific face.
Look without regard. Adoration will follow.
So much for instruction you need to subsume.
Prominence, eminence, in that order, will come.

HERBIE MEDITATES

Herbie muses: "The city has disappeared into
a reproduction of itself. Or was it my eager façade that did that?"

Herbie has passed back through the vanishing point.
Composition lessons with Maria Thallenberg
are not going well, and girlfriend Wanda is away.

"Herbie," his manager says, "did you ever look around to see
who's looking around and then everyone's looking at you because
you're looking around to see who's looking?"

Herbie wonders if memory is more dangerous than its absence.

SOUL MATES

Here, at their table in the park,
a lone sparrow approaches Wanda.
"How'd you like to be that free?" Herbie asks.
"Would you?" she says.
"He's able to fly," Herbie adds,
"but he chooses to hop."
"I wish we could disappear when you
explain us away," Wanda says.
"I'd rather lean against a river,"
Herbie counters. "That has equal meaning."
Wanda laughs; the bird flies.
And they watch it
go.

ENDURING TRUISMS AT THE HOMELESS SHELTER:
WHY WANDA IS A GOOD PERSON

The Little Orchard Homeless Shelter:
Wanda, her trained ear, and an armload of clothes,
arrive. "Blessèd be," Flo at Donations says.
It's Wanda, not Flo, who says,
"It's a treat to see you every time."
"I've got one for you," Flo says. "Charity
is its own reward."
"That's what I'm here for," Wanda says,
"and maybe the soup."
"Turkey noodle today," Flo says, "a fair exchange."
"I have groceries for you in the car."
"Now it's my turn," Flo says. "You are a treat to see, every time."
Wanda's face softens; the trained ear accepts.
Flo beams back, "Our homeless thank you."
"Flo," Wanda says, "take me to your turkey noodle."

ADDRESSING HERBIE'S BLOCK

All things relative
especially as well
the truth value of this statement.
I, too, don't like it
when you ignore
my attention-seeking ways.

It's not that you won't now, Herbie--it's that
you can't--do the words. Such is the nature of being
blocked: your goal: to rearrange the chaos
of unassembled metaphors. Herbie,
do you need to be a little down to write?
Does being semi-sad concentrate your mind? Are
you the memory that reworks itself
while we await the dawn of your becoming?
Well, that is swifter than a dead turtle.
And, you say, you see eternity in a moment. Yes,
I think I understand. Could we move on?
Or will you go seeking grains of sand? The static motion
of a partial refrain: endlessly clever and
unable to find something to say.

Found art within the inner flux,
clippings from an old thesaurus,
isolated elegance--even that would do.

POET GWENDOLYN URGES HERBIE

"You're blocked?" she says. "Whenever that happens
to me, I lower my expectations and do
some other kind of thing."
A deepness crosses Herbie's face.
You need a more cooperative muse."
"Herbie Lucid gets his muse back'?"
"I see what she sees in you," she says.
"I'm too embarrassed to ask," he says.
"You do endearment really well."
Herbie says, as they laugh, "What the hell
just happened here?"

HERBIE-TO-HERBIE REGARDING A NEW ENDEAVOR

Dude, don't mess with me.
Why the hell are you writing poetry?

Was it that book you bought:
Poetry: Music for the Spoken Voice?
Just who, Herbie, who are you trying to please?

This page you've turned to here:
"Poetry Writing Exercises."
Doodle away, man. Who knew you'd want to?

Would Wanda like it?
Just when, Herbie, did all this get started?
Fess up, dude, the book wasn't it, was it?

WILLIE THE BAND MANAGER'S RANT

Wanda Watanabe is no good for you, Herbie.
She'll drag you down, take you away from the band.
Come back, and you won't have to hear this again. We've heard
and had enough of that Wanda. There's no room
in the band for that Wanda. You have to get with us, not with that Wanda.
We had something going on, will again.
We'll be best buds, all of us, like it used to be. Dude?
Come to rehearsals, go out with us, write songs if you can.
You're wasting your time with this poetry. We need
songs, not sonnets. Poetry's not for you.
Dude. Do you hear the sound of no one laughing?

WHO'S WHO FOR HERBIE

Yes, I'm Herbie Lucid, and I play guitar.
Wanda is what matters--to me,
and I want to matter.
I know I don't write real stuff.
That's for Wanda to do.
I'll never be at her level.
She thinks she'll never be as free as me.

My best bandmate Zach is a very versatile cocky guy,
classically trained.
His confidence impressively drives
the women away.

Interchangeable groupies Tiffany, Amber,
and Jane ooh and hover
for an intermittently amused
Brian, Peter, and Zach.

Brian likes Coors. Peter goes to A. A.,
drinks Coke instead.
Willie's a faded toker.
Peter and Brian are the other two guys in our band.
Brian is hyper. Peter is cool.
Willie's our manager.
Of course, the band's The Trepidations.

AT THE BAND'S REHEARSAL

Herbie, Zach, Peter, and Brian rehearse. Their manager Willie stands to the side.
"I'll redo the lead sheets later," Zach says.
"Which we will do without onstage," Willie says.

That last riff was off," Peter says. "How're we supposed to fix it?"
"You want to write out the riff?" Brian says. "Sure, that'll
make it sound spontaneous," Zach says. Herbie laughs.

"You guys gonna play or talk?" Willie asks.
Peter says, "Maybe we'll do both till we get it right."
"Let's hear from Herbie," Willie says. "Yes," Zach adds, "let's hear from Herbie."
Brian says, "Peter, do you think we should
hear from Herbie?" and plays a short drum roll.

Peter says, "Hearing from Herbie? That almost sounds like lyrics." Herbie loves it.
He says, "All right."
"Lyrics from Herbie?" Zach says. "You gotta be kidding."
"You'll get your lyrics," Herbie replies.

"Tell them how you've been busy with other things," Willie says.
Zach says, "Yeah, dude, show us some poetry."
Peter squawks a rising progressive chord on his sax. "You're serious,"
Herbie retorts. Peter says, "You carry it with you all the time, don't you?"

Herbie fishes two sheets of paper from his pocket and unfolds them.
"He actually writes words?" Brian says.

After the briefest of beats, Peter says, "Dude, do you actually think we're happy here?"
Brian plays a rim shot, stands, and bows.

Herbie refolds the poems,
puts them back in his pocket.

PROFESSOR PATRIKA WENTWORTH'S INTERNAL MONOLOGUE TO WANDA

Expletives fail me, and even to think
of you is an affront when you come near
parading that toned and trim young body
you're using as your ticket to stay here.

Your pathetic credentials annoy me,
MFA Wanda. How soon you'll be gone.
You're none of the muses nor Cassandra.
You've picked the wrong myths to base your life on.

No volta here, yet you turn my stomach
with all you do know: humping. So hump it.
I'd bother to extend these metaphors,
but you would miss most of the allusions.

Too late, you'll learn, *mirabile dictu*,
exactly what *I* have in mind for you.

ROGER, WANDA'S EX, REVEALS

See how uneasily he looks at me.
I make Mister Lucid uncomfortable.
I'm better looking. Yes, really I am.
I make him tense whenever I'm around.
There's that rude small flaw he has on his face
and the gherkin he has there in his pants.
Just what does Ms. Wanda see in this guy?
She'll learn I have what she can't do without.
I'll stick it right where Herbie-Guy's stuck it.
Soon now, I'm really going to plug it.
No firm need to compare pickles here--though
a jar of large dills might fascinate him.

As the physicist said, "Some things are so serious, you can only laugh." And Herbie?--Where's the guffaw?

Oh, could we, for Herbie, have still another bag-piped version of "Amazing Grace"?

There's your old view of you, righted again.
No, you say?

When the reviews come in, and they're not what you thought they'd be, what do you do?--drink, feel low, want to stop? We need lyrics. Yes, new ones, and time to rehearse. Pour out the booze. Herbie, Herbie, do you want to be known for having written the words "I love the soft of you. I love the warm. And when I hold you in my arms"?

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THE DOUBLE WHAMMY

1.

Wanda talks to Karlberg, department head:

"So that's it," she says.

"All three other candidates," he says,

"are exceptional. Very."

"I don't stand a chance."

"I hate this part of my job. I thought
you'd want to know." "I do," she says.

"Your chances for tenure track are less than
even remote."

2.

The rest of the band talks to Willie:

"You really wanna get rid of him? He's good."

"Yes, tell him."

"The dude's my best bud," Zach says.

"He should be here."

"Tell him that too."

"I'm looking for a new guy. Okay."

"One who also writes the words, Willie."

Later, Willie with Herbie

as he works on his guitar:

"Dude, this is gonna be bad news."

"Nothing wrong with the Strat."

"Herbie?"

"Yes, Willie, dude."

"There's no other way to do this, man.

We couldn't wait anymore. We're
letting you go."

"Who'll do the words?"

"We... We're looking."

"I'm outta here."

AFTER THE FIRING:
ZACH AND HERBIE AT MCDOUGALL'S BAR

Zach says, "It's hard being friends with you, dude. You know?"
Herbie gulps his Coke, says,
"I need a real drink."
"I tried," Zach says, "but with the guys,
the band comes first."
Herbie shrugs.
Zach says, "You read that review didn't you? Dude,
you are down." "I'm just damned perceptive."
"Don't booze when you're like this."
"I'll remind you of this conversation
the very next time we're both drunk."
"You can make them take you back. I know you can."
Herbie shrugs again, and when Zach has gone,
stares down at the table in front of him.

HERBIE IN THE DRUNK TANK

1.

Herbie leaves McDougall's,
walks back toward his apartment.
"Sir, how are you this evening?" the cop says
through the patrol car window.
"Just on my way home."
"Are you aware it's
against the law
to be drunk in public?"
And Herbie? Herbie says, "I don't see
any public."

2.

Herbie enters the cell.
Marvin and Deek sit on cots
as Eddy kneels
and chats through the DTs:
"Lord, help me. Oh, Lord."
"How long has this been going on?"
Herbie wants to know.
"You think I have a watch on me?"
"No, Lord, no. I'll be good."
Eddy falls to the floor, writhes: "No. No!"
Herbie says, "Now look what you did."
"I did what?" "Who're you talking to?"
"Where's a jailor when you need one?"
Eddy convulses. "Okay, that's it.
JAILOR!" "GUARD! GUARD!"
Two come running.
It takes more than a while
to stop the seizing.
"You guys can go in the morning. This one, too.
We just have to watch him."
"It'll be a while before I get drunk again," Herbie says.
"I'm with you, man."
"Hell, I'm swearing off now."

HERBIE GETS APPRECIATED AT THE GATEWAY TO THE ACADEME

The sign over the counter says,
"Open University Students." Herbie stands
at the head of the line,
uses a notebook as backing, fills out
papers, finishes just in time.
At the window, he asks, "Is regular
tuition different?" The clerk sighs,
replies, "Besides the late fee you
have to pay this time?" "I'll get transcripts for
regular admission later."
"Just how eager are you?" she says.
"How soon can I go to class?"
The clerk points all the way across the room, says,
"Oh, god. Pay fees over there. Go for it. Next?"

HERBIE AND KARLBERG'S POETRY CLASS

1.

"Yes, Mr. Lucid, "you do
have to convince us to keep you.
You missed the first class.
Speak, Mr. Lucid," Karlberg says.

A hand goes up. Jerk Student speaks:
"You write those 'Ooh, baby, ooh' lyrics, don't you?
What are you doing here?"
"To help me write songs."
"Tell us how, Mr. Lucid," Karlberg says.
"Good songs and good poems
have resonant phrases."
Jerk Student blurts, "Is there really this
connection between the two?"

"Oh, yes," Karlberg says,
"Ginsberg tutored Dylan
in the poetry of Dante and Pound.
Some see influences of Eliot
in lyrics of Paul Simon.
You're a Paul Simon, Mr. Lucid?" "Herbie."
"A name. A blessing."
"I'm in?"
"When we vote," Karlberg says,
"I'll even put up my own hand."
Jerk Student fumes.

2.

Here, Herbie, two classes later, you read your two stanzas
as you endure this grace you're not sure you believe in.
"This is perhaps too personal
to be shown here" is what Jerk Student said.
"In especially your second stanza, you've done well" is what Karlberg said.
And "Hmpf" is another what-Jerk-Student-said.
What, Herbie, what? What got you into
what you want out of?
"Alone in the dark, falling.
What of me? And what of me?"
and then "What did we miss because of what we said?
Was it in the saying and not what we said?"

PERHAPS FENCING METAPHORS WOULD APPLY HERE:
WANDA--WHO SPEAKS AT THE END--
LISTENS, LEARNS, ROGER CAN BE ENDEARING TOO

Can I help it if I'm in love with my own inner voice?
Will you be remembered for some clever thing I said?
This is merely my attempt to bring you moments of undying bliss, a few
unenduring brief eternities.
What if I said the lights of other lamps will light us as we walk away?
What if I said I always knew you conveyed a state of quiet anomie?
What if we talked, instead, about the need to hide
behind these...conditional interrogatives, or to launch into
learned chatter, say, on the general decline of ritual--
give ourselves casual congratulations for
our astute *savoir*--we would name it, wouldn't we?
What if perhaps we abort verbal convolutions and I
fall calm and wordless here beside you?--you choose where.
It does always come back to that--and silence--I agree. Yes,
that's exactly what I'm saying:--I already see you laughing--If I am silent,
will you do me?

"Sure," Wanda says, "come back when you're ninety-five."
Translation: "I should live so long?"
And Wanda says, "That's a definite maybe."

YOU'VE KICKED IT UP A NOTCH
(Another Wanda Monologue)

It's the wrap party for the well-rehearsed staged reading of a dream.
The best lines have been spoken by a mime.
You finger the guitar and ask what I will
leave you with. What will I leave you with?
I would leave you with my absence,
except... you're making music.

You've kicked it up a notch now, haven't you?
None of that "take it one day at a time."
The theoretical mastery of ordinary experience,
that's what you're after.
All that moody cogitating there--just you, you, and the world.
The extraordinary pull of silence.

What are the exact words for longing?
You know in the moment you are making music, it is gone,
and memory of you fades.
Incidental, this music--crisp technique, your strength...
What's left is me, me...lingering.

THE INTRIGUE BUILDS: PATRIKA'S GOT THE POWER

1.

Roger would impress Patrika
if only Roger had a metaphor for tenure.
He got his with an MFA. Why not Wanda?
"Darling," Patrika says, settles back into her PhD,
"I had sex with you. But you had sex with her."
Roger does have a trope for how that makes him feel.
Patrika's got the power.

2.

Patrika says, "Here's the deal." "Anything,"
Roger says, "to be rid of this Herbie-
the-Musician guy." "I'll back you with doubts
about our Mister Lucid, and the cost to you:
I'm better if done twice, rather than a mere once."
"I know where," Roger says. "Tell me when...
and when." Patrika puts her hand on his knee:
"I will, I will." Of course, they laugh at this.

3.

No figure of speech can capture Patrika:
Patrika goes to Dr. Karlberg, department chair:
"Ms. Watanabe and this musician person
both need to go. He's not writing these poems of his.
One of her poet friends is. Just look at her.
Word is she's called in a favor.
You know what kind." Patrika's got the guile.
Patrika's got the gall. Patrika's got the power.

WANDA SPEAKS TO HERBIE RE: IMAGINARY MENSA MEETINGS

I like that Yogi Berra is in Bartlett's. I
like that listening to music is good for the immune system.
Congratulations on your impending life.

I didn't know I was supposed to be the life of the party.
A book of unremitting cleverness? I have found the
last et cetera.

The temperature falls, and the water begins to thicken.
Have you finished your course in remedial quantum mechanics?
Was Mischel right after all--there is no personality--

all is response to situation? How's the
self-righteous bossy child?
If so and not so--and so you did, did not--when

we meet again and it's not, and is, the same:
a reading of minutes, a summary of shifting assignations, and
agendas, not the least of which is love.

FRIENDLY SELF-ASSURANCE AND HOW IT WORKS

Gwendolyn tells Wanda, "I still have your manuscript. Good enough to publish. I can make that happen, but you have to be okay with it."

"I want," Wanda says, "poems that hold up to the critics. Accessible, too."
"Some postmodern guys would never be satisfied," Gwendolyn says. "I say screw 'em."

Wanda wants to be a player. First-string.
If she doesn't get the tenure thing here, she has to leave.

The fixed shape of her thought drives her.
How to imagine a desperation, a periodic replay of having been homeless?

"It'd make it more likely you got the tenured track spot.
You'd teach less, write more, and they couldn't fire you."

"Okay. I'm persuaded, thank you."
"I do that well," Gwendolyn says. "And I damn well know it."

ZACH OFFERS HIS HELP

"Nobody should know how bad off you are."
"How bad. How bad is that?" Herbie asks.
"Gravely disabled. They commit people for that."
"No reason to change."
"You. You look like you're not even eating."
"This must be serious--no slang."

Zach wrestles a bottle from Herbie.
"Aw, dude, what'd you want to do that for?"
"I could smack the crap outta you."
"You guys really are mean to me."
"Show me where the booze is."
"I know we're not getting drunk together. Hypocrite."
"Show me."

Herbie staggers to his feet,
shows Zach the back of two dresser drawers
and behind linen in the closet.
"When I'm done with this, I'm staying. Then, dude, we talk."
"Meanwhile?"
"First, the get-rid-of-the-booze,
and then it's 'be nice and share pizza with Herbie.'"
"I don't like it when people refer to me that way."
"Dude, you weren't meant to."

Zach collects bottles to pour out the booze.
"Let's run down a list, get you off your ass:
You're sticking it to yourself. You're messing
with Wanda's head. And you're gonna
drive your woman away."
Herbie chokes up. "What?" Zach says.
Herbie does a one-eighty. "Get out."
"Guess who's not ready for rehab."
"Damn you. Get out. Get out!"
Zach makes for the door.
"I'll help you pack a bag. Anytime."
Zach goes. Herbie throws the pizza.
It sticks, then slides
all the way down the door.

THE MOVEABLE CONQUISTADOR

On the dance floor of the Crowne Plaza Ballroom,
Wanda tells Roger, "I almost said no when you asked. I'd forgotten
how well you dance."

"Remember better now?" Roger says.
Wanda nods: "And I remember your being like this, too."
"You're going to tell me what, aren't you?"
"I see you also remember what I'm like,"
Wanda says. He says, "Mm."

"I'm forgetting again," Wanda says, "Who's leading?"
Roger offers, "You want to time share?"
"I'm not sure I want to be," Wanda says,
"a member of an equal opportunity dance pair."
"You would rhyme."
"Hey, you started this," she says.

Roger says, "God, we're clever."
"I'm doing the rhyming," Wanda says.
"It takes two," he says. Wanda asks,
"What is the sound of one single word rhyming?"
"Shut up and dance," he says.
"Hey, you weren't supposed to know that."
"Wait," he says, "till we're finishing each other's sentences...
Again."

She laughs,
Roger bows and asks, "Do you like me now?"
The music stops, begins anew. "Yes, Roger,"
Wanda says, "I like you now."

"Shall we whirl away?" he asks. They turn
slowly as they move across the floor.
"Roger," she says, "I thought you gave this up."

HERBIE GETS A CALL TO AWARENESS

She seeks out words, words that shape the world.
She hardly makes the world less chaotic,
but the bottom's really dropping out.
Yes, she is. Wanda is breaking it off.
She's right in the middle of saying it:

"I come in here and find you like this. Again.
Our being together helps you to drink.
I have to do something about this now.
We'll still be friends.
But we're not a couple anymore."

As she leaves, her eyes don't quite overflow.
Herbie, you're left... staring at a closed door.

THE CUMULATIVE EFFECT OF BROKEN JUXTAPOSITIONS

Herbie says: I'm still tomorrow and not today.
He says this all so deliberately--and pleads:
Would you make a metaphor just for me?
I could stand sideways and talk to you indirectly.
As I calculate our shove-away space,
I ask, Will our good-byes be good enough?
May I make you aware of how much you want to believe?
I don't want to hear the day comes to us across
the meadow nor that windows open toward morning.
Would you please come and scream with me?
If you feel out of place, this is the place.

WANDA: THE HUNGERING FOR THE FIX OF YOU BLUES
(lyrics by Herbie Lucid)

Wanda, it really doesn't matter what you say:
Wanda, any pronouncement--yes, any--will do.
Just say something to make it all okay.

I tell you I know how, and why, you went away.
Yes, and where you now want to be and who.
It really doesn't matter what you say.

You might think before you go your own way;
This relationship still needs a part two.
Just say something, Wanda, to make it all okay.

Wanda, you should stay; just why, I'll try to convey.
Try, if you can, to see my point of view.
Wanda, it really doesn't matter what you say.

Please, Wanda, think before you simply stay away.
I know I can't simply do without you.
Just say something, something, to make it all okay.

There are ways in which I could make you pay,
But, Wanda, I don't give a damn about what's true.
Wanda, it really doesn't matter what you say.
Just say something...to make it all okay.

HERBIE GETS PUSHED AND PRODDED

1.

"I'm afraid," Karlberg says, "some of you haven't presented in weeks. We need to look at whether these people still belong in class."

Herbie perks up.

"Yes, Herbie, that means especially you."

"I'm not ready. Nothing to show."

"If you don't bring something soon, you're out."

2.

Gwendolyn takes a look at Herbie's long poem-in-progress:

"You have to complete this. Is this the real reason you asked to come over?"

"You know?" he says.

"How's it without her?"

"I haven't shown this to Karlberg's class.

But I can't write anything else."

"Deflecting the question?" she says. "She tells me she's writing too. How is it without her?"

Herbie sighs. Gwendolyn smiles.

"It's brutal," he says.

"Both of you. You're having bursts of creativity."

"What do I do?"

Gwendolyn hands Herbie his poem.

Herbie says, "Maybe give her the time she needs."

"You think?" she says.

And as Herbie shakes his head slowly,

"I also think you're becoming a fine poet."

REGARDING PATRIKA AND ROGER

1.

When it comes to faculty reports, Patrika takes her time.
She'd said to Karlberg, "You know where I keep it. Take a look at it now."
"If I need to, I will," he said. "I need
a report, not a promise." Fortified within her sinecure,
Patrika'd said, "Soon."

2.

In Patrika's office, lights are off.
Patrika and Roger can barely see one another.
"Shh," Patrika says.
Roger says, "Shh to you too."

3.

In his office, Karlberg opens
a folder marked "Faculty Reports."
Miffed, he crosses the hall, knocks on Patrika's door.
No answer. He takes out keys and enters.

Lights on, Karlberg has his say: "Okay, my eyes are
suddenly open, you two. I'm going to look at certain recent plagiarism claims.
The possibility of being discovered makes it even better, hm?
Get dressed and go home." Then Karlberg leaves with a very loud door slam.

A SIGNIFICANT TRANSFER OF EMOTION

Here, in the park with Roger,
a warm, early spring day.
Wanda helps lay out a meal.
"Yes," Roger says, "I think writing about
Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop
could be a good follow-up to your previous piece."
"Their friendship fascinates me," she says.

Wanda smooths out the tablecloth, places
plastic glasses and plates on the table.
"What about co-authoring the paper? I'd take
second author, of course," Roger says. "It could eventually get you tenure."
"We'd see how we work together," she says. "We'd
certainly get to know each other even more."

Roger arranges the condiments and puts out napkins, utensils.
Wanda sets out the soft drinks and water.
Sparrows hop closer, closer to their table.
"Ever wonder," Wanda says, "about the sparrows,
how they come right up to you?"
"Yes, I have," Roger says, "when I've been here before."

Wanda smiles. "Yes, Roger," she says,
"I think I might like to write that paper with you."

HERBIE SEEKS COMMISERATION WITH POET GWENDOLYN

This coming together for solace now--reason for a litany.
Is it all a remembering, even this?

Recollections of remorse--sadness, mirth, pushings-away
The tenuousness of namings
Comfort of old music
The blur when we're all caught up in the here

I've settled:
I've learned to say, "That wasn't bad."
These differentiations we make to talk clearly about the world...

You're my very best acquaintance.

HERBIE AND THE FAR SOUNDS

Pity the poet who writes well in sadness:
there in the distance the carousel swirls.

The crowds, the music, go on without Herbie.
Here in the steady feel of his verse,
the far sounds impinge.

*There's comfort in being down, if it's only then
you feel like yourself.*

The pathway goes off, meanders a little,
with bright markers, their
elaborate lights
threaten the "disconnect-disconnect" mantra
that plays long in Herbie's head.

Only in "elsewhere" does the carnival
come to him/ he come to it--happiness muted, invading again.

At the border of mirth, Herbie hesitates.

There, in the distance, the carousel swirls.

HERBIE GETS A HEART-TO-HEART FROM POET GWENDOLYN

You have my permission not to change your life.
I have no idea how to reconstruct my speech to persuade you otherwise.
There is something that does not like a thought,
and, by god, there is something inadequate about words.

Our disconnected moments are strung together
with a web of [what word would work here if we knew].

We, Herbie--you and I--make our way by words.
Such words get in the way even as they
speak what we have to say, and promises
of pleasure will make us soon forget.

You love the soft of her.
You love the warm.
And when you hold
her in your arms,
the touch of her so calm,
so exciting, exciting and so calm,
you lose you in her,
in her there in your arms.

You would let all the words go by
to still lose you in her,
with her still there in your arms.

You can yet take life and change it to art.
Flat out, of all your failed hopes, Herbie,
the least of these is love.

EXPOSITION AND DIALOGUE: WHEN EMBARRASSMENT IS BEST

Face down in his own vomit, papers and pen covered too,
Herbie stirs. Yesterday, he'd gone to Gwendolyn: "What to do?
She's dating Roger De Maine."

"Let's assume I said something devastating
about that überjerk," Gwendolyn said. She almost
picked up the Coke can he'd been drinking from. But instead
she looked at him for confirmation it held booze.

"We were talking about jerks," she'd softly said.

"Überjerk?" Herbie asked.

Gwendolyn made direct eye contact; Herbie flinched.

"The quintessence of jerkdom," she'd replied.

Here, self-disgust: with hurried care, Herbie rises, cleans off the papers,
places them so on the nightstand, then removes his soiled undershirt,
searches out his secret stash, and pours the booze down the drain.

As he heads for the washer, wads his T-shirt together
with stripped bed clothes, Herbie's eyes blaze.

MISTER LUCID AS POET

With a single page in hand,
Jerk Student stands at his desk.
"Good enough," Karlberg says.
"Good enough?" Jerk Student says.
"Nothing more, nothing less."
Jerk Student sits, fumes.

"I didn't think it was all that bad," Herbie says.
"It wasn't. It was good enough. You're
up next. What have you got, if anything?"

Herbie hands copies of his poem to be passed around: "It's long,
so maybe people could read it to themselves?"
"Unusual," Karlberg says, "but we would see first if it works on the page."
Karlberg receives his copy: "Let's take a look."
Karlberg and the students start to read.

Jerk Student is astonished.
Goth Student is blown away.
Pierced Woman Student gets misty-eyed.
Karlberg finishes first and observes the other students as they reread.
It's a very good day to be Karlberg.

"Do we want to hear this out loud?" Karlberg asks.
"Yes, yes."
Herbie rises to his feet. It's his moment, and his face says it all.
Karlberg sits to listen.
"Mr. Lucid," he says, "you may now astonish us."

ADVANTAGE, MINT TEA

Wanda says, "I don't like me."

"I've known that for some time now," Gwendolyn says and hands her coffee.

"I'm manipulating Roger, and I've been mean to Herbie."

Gwendolyn waits, sips her mint tea.

"When it gets really bad, I spot homeless people everywhere."

"They are everywhere," Gwendolyn says.

"You're scaring me."

"So what do you do to Roger?"

"If I talk about Herbie, that's when Roger wants me most."

"I thought that's what you want."

"I know what I have to do," Wanda says.

"I bet you don't."

"It'll come to me."

"And what is that?"

"I have to do what will make me like me again."

"So do I win the argument here?" Gwendolyn says. "Or do you?"

SOMETIMES THE WORDS DON'T COME EASY

This guitar, maybe soon these new songs.
What are these when Wanda's gone?

Unable to imagine things any better, even in song.
Evidence of a nearness gone wrong.

Evidence of possibly not being up to the task:
Wadded-up lyrics there in the trash.

Soon, with work, my steady Strat and maybe new songs.
But what are these when Wanda's gone?

AT GIUSEPPE'S PIZZERIA:
WHAT IT'S SOMETIMES LIKE

Why would his ex-bandmates and Willie
have pizza with Herbie? Something is up.

"Okay," the waiter says, "three beers, two Cokes.
We got pepperoni and cheese, pepperoni no
cheese, and pepperoni and mushrooms."
"Help the man," Zach says.
"Yeah," Brian says,
"who gets the pepperoni?"
"What if I put them all here and you pick what you want?"
Zach pushes a Coke toward Herbie: "Here, have a no-beer."
Peter says, "Herbie, could you pass the pepperoni?"

Willie doesn't laugh, says, "Any new lyrics? Seriously?"
"None I'm ready to show. The new guy's not working out?"

Willie recovers, says, "We're looking again."
Herbie replies, "I hear the Lucid guy is all right."

"How long since you had a real drink?" Willie asks.
"Do you guys give chips?"
"We're having some made," Brian says.
Zach says, "How long, dude?"
"Long."

Peter picks up a Coke, toasts the air.
"Remind me, Zach," Willie says, "why two of us are on the wagon."
"Because I'm a very persuasive keyboard player."
"Not drinking is less fun," Brian adds.
"A lot of things," Zach says,
"are less fun than being a persuasive keyboard player."
"Cue up the laugh track for Zach," Willie says.

Right here, they laugh. Peter and Brian
give Herbie handshake/ hugs.
And Willie says, "Welcome back, man."

Why else would his ex-bandmates and Willie have pizza with Herbie?

BACK COLLABORATING WITH ZACH

Herbie sets a bust of Beethoven
just so, back on a bookcase shelf. Zach's ready to work.
Herbie's brand new lyrics propped on the piano,
Zach takes a look, shakes his head.

Herbie scratches out six lines in the middle. Reading again,
Zach follows the changes with his hand, slaps
the back of it against the stand, and plays a melody.
Herbie hears it orchestrated in his head, barely takes it in,

shrugs, waggles his hand
as Zach noodles, stops.
Zach hits a dissonant chord,
heard too well even in Herbie's head.

IT'S A VERY GOOD DAY TO BE HERBIE:

Overwhelmed by happiness, what to do?
Herbie, are you feeling ebullient?
"Yes," he says, "I'm feeling ebullient."
Word choice fails him at the great vigor of this--
Herbie's just not used to ebullience.
Today, no one has taken a soft brush
and painted him out. He's in the picture.
Even grouch Willie is overly pleased.
Still time to rehearse and lyrics at last,
all is well with the band: Herbie's come through.

THE UNTOLD FAVOR WILLIE DID
AND THE RESPONSE AFTER IT'S REVEALED
(Zach's monologue to Willie)

Tell them what you let slip, Willie.
What you let slip when you were stoned
out of your *cabeza*, Willie.
A three music-video deal
tied to success of the CD
plus an advance for paying for
studio recording time. That,
for just seventy-five percent
of gross to the label, plus points.
Let us tell you we don't like it.

Revenues have been down, have they?
No way to get studio time.
You have rights to negotiate
and got the only deal you could.

A sell-out. Jerk, you sold us out.
Next CD, we'll cut a new deal?
Next CD, man, what next CD?

Willie, this could be it for us.
We'll repeat those words, but upbeat?
You say there's time to rehearse if
we go back into this right now.

You're so glad we're not mad at you.
I think we can still manage that.
Come out, sit with us. You shouldn't
sit here by yourself. Wonder if
you're in? Herbie's in. You're in for
now, man. Hell, we're all in for now.

A PIVOTAL CALL

"You remember when we first met?" Herbie says, engages the speaker phone. "You said I live to work. And I said it's the reverse sometimes."

"I do, Herbie," Wanda says, sets aside papers she's working on.

"Some of us don't make separations like that. But sometimes, you need to."

"I feel awful, Herbie."

"I can't make you better."

"I know."

"What is it going to be? I want you back. And you want tenure track, security, and whatever it takes to get it. Do you live to work or the other way round?"

"It will come to me."

"Give yourself something-- and not necessarily time."

"My formal invitation to the concert came in the mail this morning."

"You'll be there?"

"Somehow. I'll be there."

WANDA'S TURNING POINT

Wanda sits as Roger spells out what she'll have to do to get the tenure track--and he can get it for her, too. She'll have to be his and work with him alone whenever he wants.

"And no more of that musician," he says, plays keyboard on her arm:

"I do so love the soft of you." "No. Not that with you," she says.

He drumbeats on her thigh. She pushes him away: "No" again.

"You know you want it."

"I made my mind up at age ten to be like my father."

"What the hell. Your father?"

"He was out of work a lot. Never did get tenure anywhere."

"You know what I'm offering..."

"We were homeless after he died."

"...And what you have to do."

"I wanted to be like him. Except that would never happen to me."

"I'll show you what's going to happen right here."

But Roger, I don't want it anymore, if it comes to this."

Roger grabs for her. He misses. Wanda reaches for a glass and splashes red wine in his lap:

"A little trick my father taught me."

"Damn you," he says.

"No, to hell with you. If tenure's for me, I'll do it on my own." And she grabs her purse and quickly leaves him staring at his crotch.

AFTER THE MOOD HAS LIFTED

Herbie, do you ever wonder, if you were a word,
you'd be "individuate"?

The problem is to explain the question
without actually answering it.

In these corridors where we're forced to be alone,
may your Ticonderoga go on forever.

Numbing your mind is not a maintenance job.

You have to pick your platitudes,
but it doesn't hurt if you put the humor in between.

I do wish you endless *haricots verts*. You're on your way to
"That's the way to do it."

AT THE FACULTY MEETING

"Mr. De Maine may not make it," Wanda says.
"Let's start," Karlberg says. "I think you'll all agree
I've called you here for an exceptional reason."
He hands around copies of Herbie's long poem.
"Mr. Lucid's piece--the one you've been hearing about."

Minutes later, Karlberg says, "You see?"
"A credit to the place," Patrika says.
"This is very good," Wanda says. "But there's something else."
"Ms. Watanabe, congratulations too," Karlberg says,
"on your poetry book going to be published. I was impressed,
very, when Gwendolyn showed me the manuscript."

Wanda Watanabe nods to the compliment.
"You're still in the running," Karlberg says. "The playing field is different now."
Karlberg motions for Wanda to speak.
"About my tenure track application," she says.
Still stunned from the poem, the faculty does not respond.
"There's been a change," she says.

A very angry, wine-stained Roger bursts in.
He freezes as the faculty stares at him.
Karlberg shoves him a copy of Herbie's poem.
"Here," Karlberg says, "check yourself and read this. Mr. Lucid wrote it."
"What?!" Roger says, snatches the poem. He looks at its length,
turns back, sees the faces of his colleagues.
He leaves, speechless and cowed. Karlberg relishes the moment.

Wanda exits the meeting room.
Roger retreats toward his office. He throws down Herbie's poem before going in.
As Patrika comes out into the hall, Wanda turns to her: "Okay,
I'm still the untenured MFA. For now."
Patrika says, "Yes. Yes, indeed you are."
"Right now," Wanda says, "I have a concert I have to get to."

THE CONCERT

Wanda winds her way to a seat
as the Trepidations wail.
Herbie spots her and turns to Zach, who
punches air in confirmation.
The instrumental ends. Herbie steps to the mike.
He's met with prolonged, high-pitched screams from young girls.

Wanda settles back, makes herself at ease.

"This one is new," Herbie says.
"A ballad: for Wanda."
A bluesy lead-in begins.
"You guys should really
get to know Wanda."
A murmur of laughter
flows through the crowd.
Herbie sings:

"The words get in the way even as they
speak what I have to say."

Wanda's face softens as Herbie's voice fades out and in:
Images of Herbie holding a copy of Leaves of Grass. Herbie
responding as she walks toward him. Herbie offering a sandwich
as they watch the flight of sparrows in the park.

Herbie's voice rises:

"I'd give it all--all the words--to have you back--back in my arms."
Then he speaks, "back in love. Baby,
now that you don't need me, I want you even more."

NO LACK OF LOVING
(lyrics by Herbie Lucid)

We will find it, baby,
Wherever our love has gone.
We'll find it soon
Or maybe just before too long.
Keep holding fast.
What didn't last will be ours again.
And when we have it back,
There'll be no lack of loving.

No lack of loving
Can keep us from
The loving we like.

No lack of loving.
No, no lack of loving
Can keep us from
The loving we like.
Keep holding fast.
What didn't last will be ours again.
And when we have it back,
There'll be no lack of loving.

We will find it, baby,
Wherever our love has gone.
We'll find it soon
Or maybe just before too long.
Keep holding fast.
What didn't last will be ours again.
And when we have it back,
There'll be no lack of loving.

A KIND OF RESOLUTION

The concert to test the new songs ends.
The Trepidations bow to extra-eager applause.
Wanda makes her way backstage, flashes
the pass she still has.

Herbie sits, bottled water in hand. "You wowed 'em,"
Wanda says.

"I do feel good about the songs," he says,
pauses, waits for what she'll say.

"I don't know what's going to happen."
Rapt, he replies, "Neither do I."

"Herbie?" she says.

It all comes back to him. Her eyes
give back a quickened spark:

"Could I have your autograph?"
"Yes," he says, "if I can take you to dinner."

EARLY SONG FOR WANDA

LOVE ME RIGHT. LOVE ME WRONG
(lyrics by Herbie Lucid)

Love me right. Love me wrong.
But baby, love me all night long.
Whatever you do, it's true. It's you,
Whatever you do. Baby.
Baby, all night long.

Whatever you do, whatever you say.
Baby, I will never go away.
I will stay with you. It's true.
It's you whatever we do.
Baby, all night long.

Call the shots. Love me right or wrong.
But baby, let's do it all night long.
It's true, whatever you say.
Whatever we do, it's true. It's me. It's you.
Yes, baby, all night long.

We're going strong, baby.
And even if it's wrong, it feels so right,
So right all night long.

Love me right. Love me wrong.
But baby, love me all night long.
Whatever you do, it's true. It's true,
Whatever you do. Baby.
Baby, all night long.

Whatever you say, I'm here to stay.
Love me any which way.
But baby, baby,
Love me all night long.

POINT/ COUNTERPOINT AS AFTERIMAGE OF HERBIE

Herbie says your mind can be your best friend;
it can be your very own archenemy too.
Herbie, who the hell made you Everyman?
Life is good, Herbie. Sometimes it's so good
the musicians applaud.
Herbie says he feels like he just took a brain dump.
He also says without the smoke, the mirrors
don't work.

HERBIE STATES THE THEME AND THE SOMETIMES NOT-SO-OBVIOUS
THING TO DO

Pick your way among the intuitions--
you and I, the world still around us. Still.

Do we work to live, or the other way round--even
understand questions said this way? Do we

give to life or ask what life might give us?
You are a fine poetic thing to say.

I'll come and sit beside you,
and all the thoughts I have next

will be shaped by our demand to rhyme--
right words pushed in place by what's come before.

Puffs of logic rise from exploded words.
The expectation is what it will be

and this one summing up to remember:
There is no one line to end this poem.